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# Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 INR-10 SS-15 MCT-02 ICAE-00
PA-01 SY-05 NSAE-00 SP-02 NSC-05 NEAE-00 /063 W
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P R 221214Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9957
DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 08012

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, IR
SUBJ: ABADAN THEATER DISASTER ROUNDUP

REF: (A) TEHRAN 7900 (NOTAL) (B) TEHRAN 7922 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: TEHRAN PRESS AUGUST 21-22 GIVES LAVISH COVERAGE TO AUGUST 19 FIREBOMBING OF REX THEATER, ABADAN. DEATH TOLL UNOFFICIALLY STANDS AT 430. DETAILS STILL UNCLEAR. OFFICIALS SAY TERRORISTS POURED GASOLINE ON ALL SIDES OF THEATER, THEN IGNITED IT, BUT SOME WITNEESSES HEARD AN EXPLOSION. PRESS REPORTS EXPRESSIONS OF CONDOLENCE AND OUTRAGE. OPPOSITION LEADERS SUSPICIOUS, BUT HOLDING OFF PUBLIC COMMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. TEHRAN PRESS OF AUGUST 21-22 DEVOTES BANNER HEADLINES AND NUMEROUS PHOTOS TO DISASTROUS FIRE IN REX THEATER, ABADAN (REFTELS). FIREMEN FOUND 377 BODIES INSIDE, AND DEATH TOLL HAS UNOFFICIALLY RISEN TO 430. IT WILL PROBABLY
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RISE STILL HIGHER, SINCE ESTIMATES OF THE THEATER AUDIENCE RANGE FROM 600 TO 700, AND ONLY TWENTY TO FORTY PPLE ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE ESCAPED WITHOUT INJURY. AUTHORITIES DO NOT KNOW HOW MANY ATTENDED FILM BECAUSE CHILDREN WERE ADMITTED FREE.

2. FIRE STARTED ABOUT 2145, SHORTLY AFTER PERSIAN LANGUAGE

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FILM BEGAN. MOST REPORTS STATE ARSONISTS POURED GASOLINE AROUND BUILDING, WAITED FOR IT TO SEEP INSIDE, THEN LIGHTED IT. SOME SURVIVORS, HOWEVER, REMEMBER HEARING EXPLOSION BEFORE FLAMES BROKE OUT. WITNESSES AGREE THEATER WAS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY ENGULFED IN FLAME. CROWD RAN FOR ONLY EXIT AND FOUND DOOR LOCKED. DOORKEEPER SAID IT WAS LOCKED TO PREVENT TERRORIST ATTACK. (SAME FILM WAS SUBJECT OF BOMBING INCIDENT TWO MONTHS AGO.) FIREMEN COULD NOT CONTROL BLAZE UNTIL 0200. THEN THEY COULD ONLY RETRIEVE BODIES.

3. POLICE REPORT TEN ARRESTS, INCLUDING THREE PEOPLE WHO HAD EXPLOSIVES IN THEIR POSSESSION, BUT DO NOT CLAIM TO HAVE CAUGHT THE ACTUAL PERPETRATORS. THREE OF THOSE ARRESTED ARE CINEMA OWNER AND TWO EMPLOYEES, WHO HAVE BORNE HEAVY CRITICISM FOR NEGLIGENCE.

4. EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF OVER "THE WORST TERRORIST OUT-RAGE IN LIVING MEMORY" FILL PRESS. SHAH, SHAHBANOU AND PM AMOUZEGAR SENT MESSAGES OF CONDOLENCE. SPOKESMAN FOR GROUP FOR THE STUDY OF IRANIAN PROBLEMS DEMANDED SEVERE PUNISHMENT FOR ARSONISTS, ADDING: "WORDS ARE INCAPABLE OF EXPRESSING OUR DISGUST AND ANGER AT SUCH MASS MURDER." MAJLIS DEPUTY MOHSEN PEZESHKPOUR, SPOKESMAN FOR OPPOSITION TO MARTIAL LAW IN ISFAHAN DURING AUGUST 20 SPECIAL SESSION, EXPRESSED SHOCK: " I DO NOT KNOW WHO
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COULD COMMIT THIS ACT." RELIGIOUS LEADERS CALLED ATTACK "UNISLAMIC." AYATOLLAH SHARIATMADARI IS QUOTED AS CONDEMNING ACTION OF "HOT-HEADED PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE HAVE NO LINKS WHATSOEVER." LEADING MASHAD AYATOLLAH SHIRAZI ALSO CONDEMNED ARSONISTS, AND AYATOLLAH NOURI DESCRIBED INCIDENT AS "INHUMAN." DR. SAYED HEJAZI DEPLORED "A COWARDLY ACT MOST HATED BY THE CULTURE AND TEACHINGS OF ISLAM." AYATOLLAH VAHIDI (COMMENT: A KHOMEINI SUPPORTED END COMMENT) DECLINED TO GIVE SIMILAR STATEMENT"SINCE THE TRUTH CONCERNING THIS INCIDENT IS NOT YEAR CLEAR." MIN INFO HOMAYOUN, AFTER CABINET MEETING AUGUST 21, COMMENTED THAT PEOPLE MUST UNITE AGAINST "THE GREAT TERROR," AND ASSURED PUBLIC THAT FULLER SECURITY MEASURES WOULD BE TAKEN.

5. MILITANT OPPOSITIONIST SOURCE EVENING AUGUST 21 SET FORTH TO EMBOFF HIS VIEW OF UNCERTAINTIES SURROUNDING ABADAN IN WAY WHICH SUGGESTED GOI CONNIVANCE IN FIRE, THOUGH HE BACKED OFF DIRECT STATEMENT BY SAYING OPPOSITIONIST INVESTIGATION NOW UNDERWAY. IN VIEW OF MILITANTS, FACT THAT ABADAN POLICE CHIEF RAZMI WAS POLICE CHIEF OF QOM DURING JANUARY RIOTS PLUS DELAY IN FIRE EQUIPMENT GETTING TO SCENE SUGGESTS, AT A MINIMUM, THAT OFFICIALS WERE NOT

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ON THEIR TOES. SOURCE PARTICULARLY EAGER TO ESTABLISH
THAT BOMBING/FIRE WAS NOT WORK OF "TERRORISTS," SINCE
THEY "NEVER ATTACKED PEOPLE." PROBLEM OF ABADAN FIRE IS OBVIOUSLY
ONE WHICH WILL HAUNT OPPOSITION FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

6. SEVEN MAJLIS DEPUTIES HAVE REQUESTED A SPECIAL
SESSION TO INVESTIGATE ABADAN TRAGEDY, CALLING FOR FULL
REPORT FROM GOVERNMENT.

7. MOVIE THEATERS HAVE CLOSED IN PROTEST, AND MOST WILL
REMAIN CLOSED UNTIL AUGUST 27. (COMMENT: BY-PASSING
AUGUST 24-26 HIGH MOURNING PERIOD. END COMMENT)
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# Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a
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**Copy:** SINGLE
**Draft Date:** 22 aug 1978
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960
**Decaption Note:**
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED
**Disposition Approved on Date:**
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW
**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014
**Disposition Event:**
**Disposition History:** n/a
**Disposition Reason:**
**Disposition Remarks:**
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**Document Unique ID:** 00
**Drafter:** n/a
**Enclosure:** DG ALTERED
**Executive Order:** GS
**Errors:** N/A
**Expiration:**
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**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a
**Reference:** 78 TEHRAN 7900, 78 TEHRAN 7922
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**Review Content Flags:**
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**Review Event:**
**Review Exemptions:** n/a
**Review Media Identifier:**
**Review Release Date:** n/a
**Review Release Event:** n/a
**Review Transfer Date:**
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a
**SAS ID:** 1655261
**Secure:** OPEN
**Status:** NATIVE
**Subject:** ABADAN THEATER DISASTER ROUNDUP
**TAGS:** PINS, IR
**To:** STATE DIA
**Type:** TE
**vdkvgwkey:** odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a0c9bf5d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
**Review Markings:**
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**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014